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Army Transformation: Ill-Advised from a Joint Perspective?

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Army Transformation: Ill-Advised from a Joint Perspective?

If one were to ask Americans today about the United States Army, some would certainly say the Army is changing. Even though they might not use the word transformation, they might talk of black berets or an “Army of One”. However, few Americans understand the real transformation the Army is undergoing: General Shinseki’s vision for a future Objective Force. Even though many have questioned the necessity of black berets, few seem to be asking about the transformation of the Army, especially as it relates to the joint environment in which the Army must operate. Some pertinent questions might be: Was the Army’s transformation effort a single service endeavor or was it a joint service plan? Will there be enough money available to fund the Army’s transformation in the joint context? Could the transformation effort leave the

joint force potentially vulnerable to conventional ground-based threats? After addressing each of these questions, we will see that, on balance and from a joint perspective, the Army's current transformation efforts are ill-advised.

Background

In August of 1990, noted political scientist John Mearsheimer wrote an article entitled "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War". At the time, it seemed almost impossible that people would ever long for the days of nuclear standoff with the Soviet Union. However, his major theme was that the bipolar nature of the Cold War brought stability and focus we would soon miss.¹ In many ways, his words were prophetic, particularly for the United States Armed Forces. Formidable and designed to fight the Soviet threat, the U.S. military found itself in unfamiliar territory during the much of the 1990s. Instead of preparing for a well-defined Soviet threat, the Armed Forces were called upon to participate in ever increasing numbers of humanitarian and small-scale contingencies. In essence, the Armed Forces were called upon to shape the international environment as never before. This shaping mission often brought with it the requirement to deploy quickly to areas of the world that were of little importance during the Cold War e.g. former Yugoslavia, Haiti, and Somalia. Even though none of the services were absolutely prepared for rapid deployments, the U.S. Army was the least prepared. Its prime warfighting equipment (tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, and aviation) was designed for a high intensity, ground conflict against forces like those of the former Soviet Union. They were not necessarily designed for rapid deployment to locations like

¹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War," Atlantic Monthly, August 1990.

Somalia or Kosovo. This inability to deploy rapidly set the stage for General Shinseki's call for transformation.

Transforming the U.S. Army

The essence of the Army's transformation strategy is to develop a future Objective Force that will be more "responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable and sustainable than the present force."² General Shinseki argued that the Army's current, legacy force has both heavy and light capabilities. It contains "magnificent heavy forces that are well equipped for war but difficult to deploy strategically, and magnificent light forces that can respond rapidly and are well suited for stability and support operations but lack staying power against heavy mechanized forces."³ According to General Shineski, what is missing is a force that can respond across the full spectrum of conflict. His answer is a transformed Army, able to place a combat-capable brigade anywhere in the world, in 96 hours, a division in 120 hours and five divisions in 30 days.

The Army's transformation efforts will proceed along three parallel paths: the Legacy Force, the Interim Force and the Objective Force. The Legacy Force will "maintain the capabilities [the Army] currently [has] and add selected others that are already scheduled to sustain combat overmatch..."⁴ In essence, the Legacy Force will be in place to guarantee the warfighting readiness of the Army while the transformation process occurs. The Interim Force will provide the Army with an enhanced capability for

² Eric K. Shinseki, "The Army Transformation: A Historic Opportunity," Army Magazine, October, 2000, 5.

³ Shinseki, 2.

⁴ Shinseki, 7.

operational deployment to meet worldwide requirements. Additionally, the fielding of initial Interim Brigade Combat Teams (IBCT) will validate organizational and operational models for the future Interim Force.⁵ The endstate for this transformation effort will be an Objective Force that, through intense research and development efforts, will be a lighter, more lethal, deployable and relevant force than what the Army has today. Key questions have to be answered for this force to be a reality. How does the Army reduce armored volume in combat vehicles while increasing survivability? How can it increase deployability without sacrificing survivability and lethality? How can the Army reduce in-theater support requirements and thereby reduce demands on strategic lift?⁶ The answers to these and many others will no doubt shape the future of this Objective Force. Given this background and General Shinseki's vision for the Army we can now look at the issue of transforming the Army from a joint perspective. This joint perspective is defined looking at a problem from a multi-service, non-biased perspective. In essence, a joint perspective is one that looks for synergy, not for single service gain or dominance.

Single Service or Joint Plan?

Instead of responding from a joint perspective, Army transformation seems to have been developed based on a service specific requirement to be relevant in a changing environment. In many ways, the end of the Cold War and the transition into missions designed to mold the international environment left the "heavy Army" out of the immediate mix of assets required for operations. For example, Les Aspin, the Secretary

⁵ Shinseki, 7.

⁶ Shinski, 8.

of Defense, did not want tanks deployed to Somalia because he saw them as being potentially too provocative for what was largely a humanitarian mission. Then President Clinton stated that ground forces would not be part of NATO's efforts in Kosovo; air power could accomplish the mission alone. However, when the Army was called upon to deploy an aviation heavy task force, it took so long for the deployment to occur that the forces were never used.

Clearly, from an Army perspective, something had to be done to make its heavy forces more relevant. However, was this call for transformation an effort to meet joint requirements or one simply to meet Army needs? An analogy may help answer the question. There were two running backs on a football team who found themselves under a new "all pass" coaching philosophy. Under the old system, the backs ran the ball as part of a balanced running/throwing attack. Under the new system, heavy thrusts into the line of scrimmage were only an afterthought for the coach. In order to be relevant, the running backs decided they needed to be able to catch the ball out of the backfield. Therefore, they lost weight in order to increase quickness. They do this to make themselves more relevant, not because of a team philosophy to make them more relevant.

In many respects, the Army is transforming itself so it can catch passes out of the backfield and be relevant again. If this plan were part of a total joint transformation effort from the coaching staff, looking at the roles of all players, it would be better coordinated and potentially more effective. However, this plan appears to be primarily the Army's idea. Even though Joint Visions 2010 and 2020 support the concepts of increased mobility and agility, some of General Shinseki's early

transformation efforts have been less than coordinated. For example, there are some marines who “see the new rapidly deployable medium brigade as poaching on their traditional role as first ashore...”⁷ Additionally, “Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael Ryan publicly declared that he might not have enough planes to move an Army brigade in 96 hours, because deploying the supplies and men for his own first wave of fighters and bombers would take priority.”⁸ In the analogy, it would be like the running backs expecting the wide receivers to block for them, when in fact the receivers are supposed to catch passes down the field. On the surface, these comments may just appear to be inter-service disagreements. However, they do indicate a lack of coordination on fundamental issues of roles and missions and resource allocation.

Fund Availability for Transformation?

Long-term, consistent funding may not be available to accomplish the Army’s transformation efforts within the joint environment. Fundamental changes in an organization the size of the U.S. Army, especially ones requiring extensive research and development efforts, are going to be costly. “Transformation will cost \$14 billion between now and 2014...”⁹ If the Army did not have to maintain its legacy force, it could probably fund transformation efforts by cutting several of its current combat systems. However, according to General Shinseki, readiness will not decrease, which will require a certain amount of legacy force procurement. Having said that, “There is simply not enough money to sustain current Army structure and simultaneously fund

⁷ Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., “The New-model Army,” *National Journal*, Washington, D.C., June 3, 2000, 9.

⁸ Freeberg, 9.

⁹ Jayson L. Spiegel, “Editorial: In Defense of Army Transformation: Lighter at the End of the Tunnel,” *The Officer*, Washington, July 2000, 1.

modernization. Although the House Appropriations bill provide[d] more than \$1 billion for transformation, the Army must still come up with internal savings.”¹⁰ If some of these internal savings are suppose to come from new, expensive legacy systems (like Wolverine, Grizzly, or Crusader) the Army may have to look elsewhere. Programs like these are going to be extremely difficult to cut due to political and economic pressures.¹¹ To make matters worse, recent reports indicate the Army will be well short of required equipment program funds, over the next five years. The Army says it is \$64.6 billion short of requirements for fiscal years 2003 through 2007, including a \$2.7 billion funding shortfall for the Future Combat System, the backbone of the future Objective Force.¹²

In addition to competing for dollars within its own service, Army transformation will have to compete with its sister services for funds. Ironically, the competition could include resources that would be necessary for the Army’s own transformation. For example, even based on the Objective Force model “The Air Force simply doesn’t have enough airlift to meet the Army’s needs. Until the Pentagon buys enough airlift, particularly the cavernous C-17, the goal of getting five divisions to the front in 30 days remains a dream.”¹³ Therefore, the Air Force will undoubtedly need additional funds to purchase these C-17 aircraft, to meet an Army requirement. Since the Department of Defense budget fluctuates each year, DOD may find itself in the difficult position of having to choose between modernized, transformed Army equipment or the lift to move the equipment, but not both.

¹⁰ Spiegel, 1.

¹¹ Freedberg, 8.

¹² “Army POM \$64B Short,” Inside the Army, 2 April 4, 2001, 1.

¹³ Spiegel, 1.

The battle for funding will take place in an environment where “ a majority of US citizens believe that defense spending should be lowered considerably, by as much as 25%.”¹⁴ Also, according to Loren Thompson, chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute, a pro-defense think tank “...with no Cold War threat and a President with no mandate, domestic politics are likely to determine most [transformation related] outcomes. Domestic politics will favor the status quo, or at best, incremental change.”¹⁵ The status quo or even incremental changes is not consistent with a sizable increase in Army funding for transformation, while maintaining current warfighting capability in a legacy force.

Transformation, the Joint Force and Conventional Ground Threats

Army transformation, without consistent, long-term funding, could leave the joint force vulnerable to conventional ground-based threats. Even though key conflicts in Iraq, Kuwait, and Kosovo during the 1990s were showcases for Air Force and Naval aviation assets, ground forces still have a vital role in modern warfare. There are those who argue that one of the key reasons coalition air assets finally succeeded against Serbian forces in Kosovo was action by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) ground units that forced Serb

¹⁴ Marvin Leibstone, “US Army Transformation & the Big Picture,” Military Technology, Bonn, October, 2000, 1.

¹⁵ James Kitfield, “A Small Study Carries a Heavy Burden,” National Journal, 3 March, 2001, 646.

forces out in the open.¹⁶ Clearly, the U.S. Navy and Air Force still rely on the Army, with help from the Marine Corps, to defeat conventional, ground-based threats.

However, over the next several years the Army's 20-ton vehicle, interim force will be much more vulnerable to conventional ground-based threats than heavy forces have been in the past. "Current 20-ton vehicles are much more vulnerable than heavier vehicles. Most likely will be able to stop a 7.62 mm bullet but would need additional, bolted on armor to protect against a 14.5 mm heavy machine gun and primitive rockets such as the Russian rocket-propelled grenades."¹⁷ When it comes to more potent systems, this interim force would be overmatched. "Missiles or tank cannon fire, even a 20mm quick-firing cannon, found on cheap Russian vehicles sold worldwide, [would] kill the medium brigade's lightly armored vehicles."¹⁸ Therefore, in the short-term, a joint force using the Army's interim capability would be vulnerable to a basic ground-based threat. A solution might be to call the Air Force in to defeat these threats the Army previously was able to easily defeat.

In defense of the transformation effort, future combat systems are supposed to be superior to current systems and weigh only 20 tons. One way to achieve the weight loss might be a distributed system that relies on smaller, more easily transportable components. "Rather than rely on heavy armor to take hits, the components would exploit their small size, high speed, and advanced electronics to avoid detection in the

¹⁶ David A. Fulghum and John D. Morrocco, "Air War Pays Off; Serbians Pull Out," Aviation Week & Space Technology, 14 June 1999, 63.

¹⁷ Freedberg, 5.

¹⁸ Freedberg, 5.

first place.”¹⁹ However, radical changes like those inherent in a distributed combat system will require consistent, long-term funding.

If funds are unavailable to accomplish the transition to the future combat system or if the system is just unattainable over the next several years, the joint force may find itself with an Army of interim vehicles with little to no legacy force remaining. With money spent on transition to the interim force and not on maintaining the U.S. armored vehicle manufacturer industrial base, there would be no assembly lines to manufacture needed tanks, infantry fighting vehicles or self-propelled artillery. Even in transition to a new future combat system the “possibility exists that either General Dynamics or United Defense, the Army’s two armored vehicle suppliers, [will] not be part of the eventual team that is selected for [the Future Combat System]...”²⁰ Back to the football analogy, it would be as if our running backs lost weight in order to be part of the passing attack and then were called upon to run the ball in key short yardage situations. With less weight, the backs could get to the line of scrimmage quickly but could not withstand attempted tackles that they would have shrugged off in the past. Without a healthy investment in the armored vehicle manufacturer industrial base, the running backs would not be able to gain back needed weight.

Solutions to the Problem

From a joint perspective, the Army’s transformation program is ill-advised because it is based on the service specific need to be relevant and not on joint needs;

¹⁹ Freedberg, 5.

²⁰ Baumgardner, 3.

because long-term, consistent funding may not be available; and because transformation could leave the joint force vulnerable to conventional ground-based threats. What then are some potential solutions to the problem? First, through the Joint Strategic Planning System, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense should mold the Army's transformation efforts to better suit the needs of the joint force. In the Joint Planning Document, Chairman's Program Assessment, and the Chairman's Program Recommendation, the Chairman should ensure that Army relevance translates to joint relevance. The Secretary of Defense could use the Defense Planning Guidance and the Future Years Defense Plan to ensure the Army's transformation efforts are not at odds with future joint transformation. In essence, this entire process would be like the coaching staff analyzing whether or not they want the running backs to catch and/or run the ball and if weight loss is necessary or not. Also, establishing a joint forces transformation position might be helpful. Increased emphasis by the Joint Requirements Oversight Counsel, could also reinforce current efforts by United States Joint Forces Command. These efforts could better focus future combat system developments and balance them against lift requirements so that each is not competing against the others.

Another approach would be to modify the Army's current transformation effort. Steven Kosiak, Andrew Krepinevich, and Michael Vickers posit an interesting modification.

The Army should proceed with its current transformation effort, but it should modify to better address emerging threats, as well as existing requirements. This means earmarking one division (and associated National Guard units) to conduct field exercises oriented on solving the anti-access challenge, developing an advanced capability to

conduct urban control and eviction operations, and exploiting the potential of ground forces to see deep and engage at extended ranges.²¹

However, even though this recommendation would certainly strengthen the Army's ability to better address emerging threats, it would do little to address the joint problems of funding and those of short-term ground-based vulnerability.

Another solution would be a quasi-legacy/interim force. A portion of the legacy force would be replaced by interim brigades, which would fill the gap between light and heavy forces. However, a vast majority of the legacy force would remain with the industrial base to support it. Ironically, this option might occur naturally after General Shinseki leaves as the Army Chief of Staff in 2003. Without the key architect of the plan in place, the effort may lose momentum. The result might be a partially transformed quasi-legacy/interim force that has elements more deployable and lethal than the current light or heavy forces, but with a retained heavy conventional capability. However, from a joint perspective, a coordinated effort to focus the Army's transformation program would certainly be better than hoping for a partially transformed quasi-legacy/interim force.

One might ask, "What about the Army's need to be more 'responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable and sustainable than the present force?'" Granted, documents like JV 2010 and JV 2020 do call for joint forces to have many of these capabilities. However, what is unclear is whether or not all forces must have these types of characteristics. A synergistic joint team could be responsive, deployable, agile etc.

²¹ Steven Kosiak, Andrew Krepinevich, and Michael Vickers, "A Strategy for a Long Peace," CSBA, 30 January 2001, 5.

without each of the team members having every optimal capability. In the end from a joint perspective, the Army must be a relevant member of the joint team; therefore, transformation efforts need to focus on joint relevance, not Army relevance alone.